

# *Report*

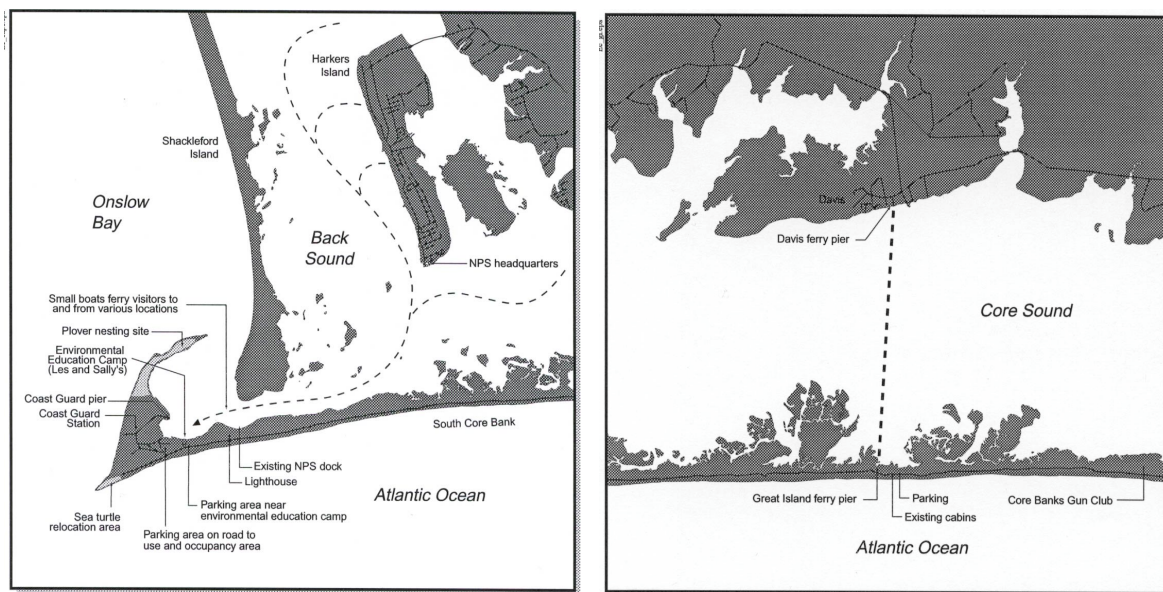
# Cape Lookout National Seashore

## ■ 1.0 Site Description

Cape Lookout is a 56-mile-long section of the Outer Banks of North Carolina running from Ocracoke Inlet on the northeast to Beaufort Inlet on the southeast. It was established in March 10, 1966 and is part of the NPS and included on the North Carolina Registry of Natural Heritage Areas on May 23, 1986. Three undeveloped barrier islands – North Core Banks, South Core Banks and Shackleford Banks – make up the Seashore.

The Cape Lookout National Seashore encompasses approximately 28,243 acres. The main visitor center is located on the eastern end of Harkers Island (see Figure 1), approximately 20 miles east of Beaufort, North Carolina and 30 miles south of the Cedar Island terminus of the North Carolina State Ferry route from Ocracoke Island to Cedar Island. A visitor center is also located at the Cape Lookout Lighthouse in the Lighthouse Keeper's Quarters. Parking areas are available for buses at Harkers Island Visitor Center. Long-term parking areas serve as a low-cost alternative for people who visit the Core Banks frequently and stay on the islands for a day to several weeks at a time. Some measures have been instituted to regulate the number of vehicles stored on the Core Banks and the NPS restricts vehicles to defined routes. A parking permit is \$6.00 weekly. This permit is required for vehicles that will be left unattended on the banks. There are no paved roads on the Seashore. Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) or four-wheel-drive vehicles are recommended when visiting the islands.

In a 20-year span, visitation to Cape Lookout rose from approximately 27,000 visitors to over 380,000. In 1998, 357,443 visitors visited the Seashore. The majority are day-use visitors. The average stay is from two to five hours. Visitation is greatest during the summer months and concentrated on the southern end of South Core Bank. As a result, summer occupancy of cabins has risen nearly 25 percent over the past three years at the Long Point location, while visitation at the Great Island location have remained fairly constant. Access can be difficult to remote sections of the seashore such as Portsmouth Village, and visiting all three islands can take a total of seven ferry rides.

**Figure 1. Maps of Cape Lookout National Seashore**

## 2.0 Existing ATS

Cape Lookout National Seashore is accessible only by private ferries leaving from Harkers Island, Davis, Atlantic, Beaufort, Morehead City and Ocracoke. The NPS permits the operation of three small ferry companies that provide passenger (no vehicles) ferry service from Harkers Island to the Cape Lookout Keeper's Quarters area. These service providers are issued Incidental Business Permits (IBP) on an annual basis to provide interim small boat service to the lighthouse area. Other operators leave from Beaufort and Morehead City. Another service travels between Ocracoke and Portsmouth Island. Two independent concessionaires operate services to the Great Island area and the Long Point area (located on the North Core Banks) with passenger and vehicle ferry service and overnight accommodations. They transport visitors and vehicles to these areas and manage and maintain cabin facilities at each site. Ferries run mid-March to December. Passenger-only Ferries charge \$10 to \$14 per person (roundtrip) during off-peak season and \$15 per person during the peak. Passenger and vehicle ferries charge \$14 per person and \$75 per standard size vehicle (18.5 feet and under). Larger vehicles cost more. A one-way ferry trip usually takes approximately 25 minutes. The concessionaire is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the ferry and the cabins.

A limited private beach shuttle service also operates in the summer months. The fare is \$10 per person from the Lighthouse ferry landing to Cape Point, or \$3.50 per person per mile (minimum two persons) from the ferry landing on North Core Banks. Shuttle arrangements are made through ferry services.

Between 1992 and 1997, the concessionaire for the Atlantic-Long Point route reported transporting between 10,000 to 12,000 visitors annually. The ferry transports passengers to the Long Point dock from April through the end of November. Total visitation has risen approximately 10 percent over the last six years. May, October, and November are the most popular months for surf fishing and thus the busiest for the ferry and cabin operations. Between the same period, the concessionaire for the Davis-South Core Banks route reported transporting between 15,000 to 18,400 visitors annually. Total visitation at this location has risen approximately 16 percent over the last six years. Most ferry passengers are overnight visitors who occupy the cabins, stay in their own RVs, or camp at the Seashore. There is no congestion at most of the parking sites, and the ferries are able to handle extra capacity during the peak.

### ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Current transportation needs are satisfied by private ferry services. Therefore, there do not appear to be any short-term Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs. Furthermore, the parking areas at the ferry terminals and the visitor center and the ferries themselves are rarely congested. The 1999 *Draft Amendment to the General Management Plan and Environmental Assessment* has stated a preferred plan. The NPS would enter into a long-term contract with a concessionaire to provide ferry service between Atlantic and the Long Point cabin area. The concessionaire would be responsible for the financing, construction, and maintenance of the new units. Cabins would conform with State and Federal building, health, and safety codes, and would be sensitively designed and arranged to comply with the special conditions of a barrier island. The construction of the cabins would be phased in. Visitors would leave Atlantic on a concessionaire-operated ferry from a concessionaire owned or leased facility. Ferries would transport both vehicles and passengers. In the event no successful bid comes forward, the NPS would explore the purchase of property and construction of a departure facility in Atlantic to ensure the availability and administrative control of the facility. Purchase of property in Atlantic would necessitate a legislative boundary change. The NPS would also explore the use of Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge land in Atlantic for a dock facility. The concessionaire ferry would land at the dock at Long Point and would also be responsible for regular repair and upgrading of the piers at both Atlantic and Long Point.

### ■ 4.0 Basis for ATS Needs

Short-term ATS needs are being met by current service providers. Since the park has just completed a draft amendment to the GMP and is in the process of exploring future opportunities and roles with current concessionaires, long-term ATS needs are not established at this point.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

Cape Outlook National Seashore. *Draft Amendment to General Management Plan, and Environmental Assessment*. Cape Lookout National Seashore, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1999.

Cape Lookout National Seashore Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/cal/>).

## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Michael Rikard, resource management specialist, Cape Lookout National Seashore